



“Do not look for me in identification with or opposition to something: I am where desire and fear are not.”—*Nisargadatta Maharaj*

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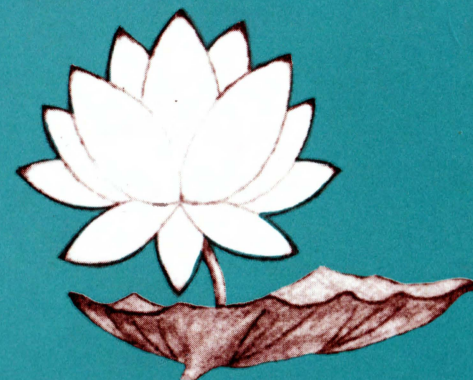
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Robert Powell

The Blissful Life

Chelana



The Blissful Life

As Realized through the Teachings
of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

compiled by
Robert Powell

The Blissful Life

As Realized through the Teachings of
Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

Also by Robert Powell

Zen and Reality
Crisis in Consciousness
J. Krishnamurti—The Man and His Teaching
The Free Mind
Return to Meaningfulness
The Great Awakening

Compiled with commentary and notes
by

Robert Powell



Chetana

Foreword

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Robert Powell reveals to us a particular version of ancient Eastern philosophy-religion through his selection of aphorisms of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj translated from Marathi. In these aphorisms, he captures and summarizes the wisdom of India epitomized in *advaita* as philosophy and practised in everyday life as a blissful religion. Although Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj lived the humble life of a Bombay cigarette merchant and family man, he was sought after as a guru and many sought and benefited from his teachings: The purpose of life is to be freed from suffering. The way is to discover, eventually and all at once, that only the self *is*, that the self is impersonal pure awareness, beyond space and time, and, when unattached to any thing, is pure bliss. But desire, any desire, even a desire for bliss, causes anticipation of something future with resulting painful frustration, since what appears as future *is* not, and cannot *be*. Only what is, *is*. Wisdom consists in remaining passive, silent, quiet, and aware. "Once you know yourself and are neither attached nor detached to your actions, whatever you do is right." One does not seek to change the world, even to make it better, for such improvement is irrelevant to the supreme self which can remain blissful only by remaining aloof and attentive to its inattention to mind/ body distractions.

Powell's selection of aphorisms and his comments on them emphasize many subtleties inherent in the wisdom of Maharaj. His book should provide profound inspiration for those willing to actualize authentic Eastern wisdom.

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Preface

On September 8, 1981 died one of the most remarkable spiritual teachers of his time and even in the history of mankind, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. It is to his immortal memory that the present volume is reverentially dedicated.

This book attempts to distill the essence of the teachings of Maharaj from the available information and present the result in terms that are readily intelligible and do not require any specialized religious or philosophical knowledge or aptitude.

A considerable part of what has been recorded of Maharaj's teaching is contained in the monumental work *I Am That*, a collection of conversations with Maharaj, translated from tape recordings in the original Marathi language by Maurice Frydman. The latter was a brilliant Polish electrical engineer and inventor who spent about half a century in India, where he immersed himself in the ancient teaching of *advaita* (non-duality). Frydman died on March 9, 1976 at the age of 75. Just as Paul Brunton discovered and introduced to the West that other great Indian sage, Sri Ramana Maharshi, so Frydman was the first to translate and make known to a wide audience Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The world owes a debt of gratitude to Frydman, for without his initiative and untiring efforts this treasure would not have been available.

Today more than ever, mankind is sorely in need of enlightenment on a spiritual level. We have technological information in abundance and it is rapidly increasing all the time but has failed to relieve sorrow and conflict. Ignorance (i.e., the fundamental kind of ignorance about what we are and the right way to live) is rampant. The threat of a nuclear holocaust is ever with us. Man still has not found peace within himself. Maharaj points to a way out of our predicament. In this writer's view, there is no other way.

Acknowledgment

The statements attributed in this book to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj have been quoted verbatim from *I Am That: Talks with Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*, translated from the Marathi tape recordings by Maurice Frydman, revised and edited by Sudhakar S. Dikshit, 3rd ed. (Bombay: Chetana Pvt. Ltd., 1981; U.S. edition, Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, 1982). I am extremely grateful to Mr. Dikshit, its editor and publisher, for permission to use this work as source material and, more generally, for the trust he has granted me in undertaking this project.

The commentaries on the teaching and aphorisms by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj appearing in the present collection are the sole responsibility of the compiler.

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Part I

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

The Man and His Teaching

A Short Introduction

Let me first say a few words about the spiritual dimension of our existence, which most people have yet to discover. The spiritual life starts with self-enquiry and ends with self-enquiry: it is an endless journey. Why should the reader, who may be a complete novice to all of this, and perhaps consider he has many more pressing and worthwhile things to do in his life, even bother to take an interest in such matters? What is the point of self-knowing and has it got any meaning at all, except perhaps as an indulgence in some form of esotericism or mysticism?

Maharaj was once asked about the self: "Is the search for it worth the trouble?" Back came the terse reply: "*Without it, all is trouble.* If you want to live sanely, creatively, and happily, and have infinite riches to share, search for what you are." (p. 221)*

On another occasion, when asked whether self-realization is really that important, his answer was: "Without it you will be consumed by desires and fears, repeating themselves meaninglessly in endless suffering. Most of the people do not know that there can be an end to pain. But once they have heard the good news, obviously going beyond all strife and struggle is the most urgent task that can be. You know that you can be free and now it is up to you." (p. 331)

Like the Buddha, Ramana Maharshi, J. Krishnamurti and others, Maharaj was one of the supreme messengers of these joyous tidings. Maharaj rightly stated "*the good news,*" because there really is no other good news in the world ever. Its essence is: There *is* an ending to suffering, and this is not just an idea, an impossible dream, but it is an actuality. Liberation becomes a fact through self-realization, and self-realization is the fruit of true maturity, of understanding—specifically, understanding of oneself. This is man's real work in the world, his *only* work; all else is window dressing.

*Throughout this book, page numbers given for citations are from the American edition of *I Am That* (Durham, North Carolina: The Acorn Press, 1982), published by arrangement with Chetana Pvt. Ltd., Bombay, India.

An important characteristic of self-realization is that it represents a sudden, explosive event—taking place, as it were, outside time.* Now people of a theoretical disposition, who never actually experienced this thing, have speculated for many years about the nature of self-realization, and some of them have advanced the notion that it concerns a gradual process which entails various stages. Thus, they have built an entire hierarchy dependent upon which particular stage a person has attained. Maharaj has this to say on the subject: “There are no steps to self-realization. There is nothing gradual about it. It happens suddenly and is irreversible. You rotate into a new dimension, seen from which the previous ones are mere abstractions.” (p. 331)

And also: “There can be progress only in the preparation. Realization is sudden. The fruit ripens slowly, but falls suddenly and without return.” (p. 332)

According to Maharaj, one of the first things one can usefully do if one wishes to embark upon the spiritual life, is to ask oneself the question “Who am I?” In this, as in many other aspects, Maharaj’s approach is akin to Ramana Maharshi’s; this need not be surprising, as both teachings have their root in the Upanishads. But since the Upanishads are a wisdom or truth teaching, the link between these Masters and the scriptures may be wholly fortuitous. For, generally it is found that truly enlightened sages came to their state of understanding through a direct intuition or realization of the truth rather than via study of the scriptures. Similarly, their teaching may either employ these scriptures as a teaching aid or do without them entirely—as befitting the student’s background. The latter approach, for example, may prove highly suitable with most Westerners not steeped in any Oriental tradition; whereas orthodox Hindus may best be touched by showing them the hidden meaning of the formalized teaching. Maharaj, because of the historical facts of his birth and upbringing in a Hindu society, was eminently equipped for such a dual teaching capability.

Although the word “guru” is very loosely used these days,

*Interestingly, this writer has observed that in nature all significant changes, on a really fundamental level, are abrupt, never graduated. In biology and physics, for example, such changes are respectively, mutations and quantum jumps.

and has been applied also to Sri Nisargadatta, Maharaj was quite unlike the typical guru who demands strict obedience and cultivates an attitude of psychological dependence in the student. These words by Maharaj define the task of the teacher with great brevity and uncommon clarity: “The only help worth giving is freeing from the need for further help. Repeated help is no help at all. Do not talk of helping another, unless you can put him beyond all need of help.” (p. 146)

Most works dealing with a great philosophical or religious figure seek to fit him into “proper perspective” by comparison with other thinkers, classifying him as belonging to a particular school of thought; or, if the man is simply too innovative to place him anywhere, they create a new school of thought around him. In this way they hope to fix his position in his field once and for all. I will not submit to the temptation to treat Maharaj in this fashion, for the latter was uniquely his own man and his teaching does not lend itself in the least to such facile pigeonholing. The fact of the matter is that Maharaj transcended the limitations of his humanness and emerged as a full-fledged enlightened being, to whom our conventional classification schemes no longer have any relevance. He himself stated in this connection: “Do not look for me in identification with, or opposition to, something: I am where desire and fear are not.” (p. 238)

Maharaj was an unsophisticated working man with little formal education, who spoke only Marathi. He never studied the Upanishads. His attitude towards scriptures is summed up by his statement: “To know scriptures only, is to know nothing.” He transformed himself entirely through his own meditation and life experience, although he gives full credit to his guru, who provided him with the necessary initial directions.

The Essential Teaching

Maharaj’s teaching is a model of simplicity and beauty. Being the complex creatures that we are, we find simplicity quite alien to us and have become too “sophisticated” to appreciate the kind of beauty that goes with simplicity.

To Maharaj, Reality is what is at any moment. With most of us, our observations are colored by expectation, desire and fear. There are so many unspoken assumptions underlying our thinking, and we are not aware that the mind has become very

complex, heavily conditioned, and a most unreliable instrument for processing information from the outside world. The problem has crept up on us, because we have never gone into the basic processes of perception and conceptualization, and have assumed that the mind is all there is, thereby ignoring the aware Intelligence which makes it all possible. Essentially, what happens is that we see the multifarious shapes of the physical world and immediately the mind comes in and attaches names to these forms and so gives them continuity. Then, every new perception is fit by the mind into the familiar framework of past entities perceived. Thus, we live largely in a symbolical world in which we can communicate information but are never really in touch with what lies beyond the symbols. The words and symbols are taken for the real. Maharaj endeavors to wake us up from this dream of unreality and induce us to discover our real self.

The teaching may be likened to a flawless diamond, dazzling in its brilliance and clarity, which has innumerable facets each giving entrance to the central truth and each reflecting all the others. Let us examine one of these facets:

Man is neither a body, with whose shape and name he has identified, nor a mind, which is essentially a composite of various images given continuity by memory. What he is, his self, cannot be defined in positive terms, for the latter are always derived from, and dependent upon, body/mind. It is best referred to in negative terms: not *this*, not *that*, not any "thing" (*neti-neti*). It can be experienced or realized when one goes beyond the words "*I Am*" and holds fast to the feeling of *I Am*, which all human beings have in common and is the one thing they cannot disagree about.* This awareness is undifferentiated and, not being dependent upon body or mind, lies outside space and time. Rather, the opposite is true: Space and time lie within this self-awareness; they are the very framework of the mind and constitute its particular mode of functioning when engaged in the customary process of linear thinking. Although we have been brainwashed into believing that we exist within the world, the truth is just the reverse:

*Even in the unlikely event that someone were to play devil's advocate and maintain "I am not," who is it that says so? In the very denial, he would confirm "I am." (See also p. 51.)

the world exists within the self. Therefore, to remain true to our real self, we must not get entangled with unreal things and stay totally aloof from the events of the body and mind. This implies to strictly maintain a stance of pure witnessing, never intervening or trying to control the events in our psychological-emotional world. This becomes an actuality by ever going from fact to fact, from observation to observation, without filtering our perceptions through thought, opinion, desire and fear. Thus, there is nothing that we must do; on the contrary, it is sufficient to stay passive, quiet, silently aware, forever vigilant. In such a state of pure awareness, when the mind is absolutely silent, one becomes a mere witness to his thought life. The "persona" continues as part of the world, but identification with the witness ceases.

Initially, it will be found that such an attitude of alert witnessing with a totally silent mind is not easily maintained, for the mind soon reverts to its old patterns of evaluating, taking sides, anticipating, controlling, driven as it always is by desire and fear. But when the awareness is strong and broad enough, witnessing is reestablished of its own—easily, naturally—by focusing on the slipping out of the state of aloof observation and dispassionately watching the mind's various antics. Paradoxically, this means becoming attentive to one's inattention.

Maharaj indicates that what one will and must discover eventually is a state of pure "beingness," without any differentiation; that is, one is no longer this or that (i.e., anything in particular), neither a body nor a mind; there is no subject nor object. One is that in which all these things have their being. Thus, one is not in the world, but the world is in oneself; one does not act upon the world, but the world happens to oneself. All has its being in the "me," in the "I am" that shines in every human being. The reader will appreciate that this realization is a lot more cosmic than those speaking of "cosmic consciousness" can even dream of!

This writer has never had any problem divorcing himself from the idea he is the body. For he has never felt the soma to be his basic reality, has always considered it to be a mere mental reflection—the product of the senses and the brain. As to the psyche, in his lifetime he has held to so many different and conflicting images of "himself," with varying degrees of self-

importance, and acted from these inward subjectivities in his outward relationships, that one day he simply gave up on all of them, and realized his essential no-thingness. From then on, he has lived in a state of unknowingness with respect to his self-being, bordering on the naive and, what some may consider, the “unrealistic.” However, if what is “realistic” is ultimately subjective and arbitrary, then so be it. These days, he remains wary of all the efforts by the mind to box him in; he shuns all its supplications to demand his allegiance or identification. At all times, his attitude is to maintain a respectable distance from the mind and its fabrications.

For those to whom the teaching is too revolutionary, too alien to their long-accustomed outlook on life, Maharaj suggests they keep an open mind and experiment with it on a provisional basis of acceptance. Then, after some time they may well find the truth of the matter quite naturally, when the old ways of thinking drop away. After all, what we *are* is largely a matter of thinking: that which we take ourselves to be. If we regard ourselves as separate, limited entities, then we shall express that essential limitation in our outlook and in all of our relationships. But if we see ourselves as the infinite expanse of Consciousness, which embraces all and everything and constitutes Infinite Potentiality, then our paltry life may be transformed as though touched by a breath of the divine.

The approach to such a truly holistic vision can, however, never occur through a direct, conscious effort; that is, by thought, by imagination. The finite can never embrace the infinite. Because thought operates only on the intellectual level, such effort must ever lead to self-deception. When thought projects from its state of limitation, its projection will inevitably contain the seed of its own pettiness.

There is an alternative to direct, conscious effort. This is what has been called the *via negativa*: dealing with the limited, the false, and seeing it *as* the limited, *as* the false. Thus, one starts unraveling the mechanisms of the mental processes in which we are so heavily entangled—this, to me, is the essence of meditation.

Actually doing this for oneself, and seeing all that is involved, is a true revelation, and has its own liberating effect. We have never realized—at least, not clearly, consciously—what we

have done to ourselves; how we have crippled ourselves—we, who were meant to be free, happy human beings.

Maharaj pithily describes man in his unemancipated state: “. . . how little he knows himself, how he takes the most absurd statements about himself for holy truth. He is told that he is the body, was born, will die, has parents, duties; learns to like what others like and fear what others fear. Totally a creature of heredity and society, he lives by memory and acts by habits. Ignorant of himself and his true interests, he pursues false aims and is always frustrated. His life and death are meaningless and painful, and there seems to be no way out.” (p. 432)

What has happened is that unthinkingly, imperceptibly, we have allowed ourselves to become anchored in certain situations, commitments, orientations, patterns of thought and action, anticipations, and role playing, through lack of awareness in our relationships. Thus, our essential no-thingness, the pure “I am-ness” of the infant is converted into an “I-am-this, I-am-that” attitude, with its implied vested interests that all need to be defended—and so freedom is lost.

As a result, consciousness is no longer fluid, but locked into a multitude of frames of reference. Now when a fluid medium interfaces with a non-fluid one, a boundary layer forms. So, when reality, which is ever fluid, impinges upon the non-fluid individual consciousness, a certain tension develops. So long as everything goes what we call “well,” nothing happens to cause disturbance. But when things go “wrong,”—i.e., when they do not fit neatly into, and contradict, our frames of reference—there is a resistance, which may be experienced as self-consciousness, frustration, conflict, and sorrow. The mind is largely that whirl in consciousness. If there were complete fluidity in consciousness, no boundary and no crystallization of thought would occur, and there would not even be a mind.

Let me illustrate some of these basic mechanisms at work in everyday-life situations. The idea of “ownership,” which is really an attempt at control over life—to make permanent a natural, momentary relationship—is a self-projected fixation, which then becomes a powerful, central frame of reference to bind the mind, causing much mischief. We *must* possess . . . and ever more and better things. Consequently, we are locked into further frames of reference, each leading to the next, such as comparison, envy, ambition, and so on. If anything goes wrong

within these reference systems, we suffer frustration, hatred, anger, bereavement, and so forth.

Meditation would go to work on this as follows. It investigates the basic thesis: "I *must* own." Why *must*? Why *own*? It does not admonish "I must *not*," but simply goes to the root of the various arbitrary concepts that we have allowed to lock us into untenable situations—untenable in the cool light of reality. This kind of meditation is hard work, but it exposes the cobwebs of the mind and cleans up the entire consciousness so that only Nothingness is left.

To give another example, let us observe our aspirations in our career, what we expect from a spouse, our children, the body with which we are so completely identified, even our progress in the spiritual life. No matter whether these expectations are termed realistic or unrealistic in everyday parlance, the point is that *any* assumptions, *any* expectations about events that are emotionally significant to us—because at bottom we want to have complete control over these events—are unrealistic from the spiritual point of view. This is because these anticipations contribute to the formation of a center, which has body-awareness, is in competition with other, similarly artificial entities, has vested interests which it will defend, and strives for its own continuity—and by all these means leaving that "center" wide open to suffering. A mind that is always anticipating is really trying to do the impossible: seeking to convert the unknown (the future) into the known (the present), uncertainty into certainty—for the sake of its own security. Now man is free to do anything he wants, except those things that are inherently impossible, that go against the natural law. This effort to achieve the impossible always exacts a severe price: Reality soon takes over and leaves our synthetic world, fabricated by the imagination, in shambles. The center sensing itself not being recognized by Reality *as a center* is the experience of suffering.

We must conclude that, ultimately, nothing short of dying to all that anxious mind activity, resulting in the wiping away of the center, can be the redeeming factor—a most uncompromising position, but nevertheless the only sound basis for the birth of a spiritual dimension in our life. Only when the movement into unreality comes to an end, can we live in harmony with Reality. To see clearly how the mind, which ever strives for

happiness, is its own worst enemy in this respect, is true meditation.

Maharaj's Uniqueness

Now, for a few final observations about some unique features of Maharaj's teaching. Of all the Upanishadic teachers, Maharaj must have been one of the most flexible in molding the teaching to the state of readiness of the student, yet not watering down the truth and subtlety of spiritual issues. Let us explore, for example, the highly controversial subject of Desire. Whereas many spiritual teachers frown upon or bluntly condemn self-related desire, Maharaj qualifies this as follows:

Maharaj: Desires are right or wrong according to circumstances; it depends on how you look at them. It is only for the individual that a distinction between right and wrong is valid.

Questioner: What are the guidelines for such distinction? How am I to know which of my desires are right and which are wrong?

Maharaj: In your case desires that lead to sorrow are wrong and those that lead to happiness are right. But you must not forget others. Their sorrow and happiness also count. (pp. 25-26)

And what do desires mean to Maharaj personally? Here is his testimony: "You identify yourself with your desires and become their slave. To me desires are things among other things, mere clouds in the mental sky, and I do not feel compelled to act on them." (p. 360)

Other teachers have stated that it is not the desire per se, which is always for pleasure of one form or another, that is the hindrance but only the cultivation thereof, the urge for its continuity. Now it will be readily seen that this comes to exactly the same thing as one's identification with desire.

Finally, Desire as an attractive force plays an essential part in the general scheme of things, as expressed so well by Maharaj: "... Wherefrom come all the powerful attractions that make all created things respond to each other, that bring people together, if not from the Supreme? Shun not desire, see only that it flows into the right channels. Without desire, you are dead. But with low desires, you are a ghost." (pp. 303-304)

And, one might add: May it not be that this general principle of attraction or cohesion is manifested also on the material level, as the gravitational and electric forces that hold in balance solar and atomic systems and thereby the entire manifested Universe?

Generally, Maharaj's vision rises above the disputations and hairsplitting so prevalent amongst theologians. For example, although Hinduism, Vedanta, and Buddhism are all based upon the principle of *Advaita* (non-duality), there are also Hindu schools of thought that hold to duality. Maharaj is not the least involved in such controversies. He points out that even if duality were the ultimate nature of reality, there would be nothing wrong with duality, as long as it does not give rise to conflict. For, ultimately, duality without strife amounts to the same thing as non-duality: bliss is the result, either way.

Among the many poignant observations which Maharaj makes about the human condition is that we look at reality through the mind's eye, and so distort reality. Yet, we may notice the contradictions in our ordinary perception. For example, what we actually want is happiness, yet we create our own hell—our own suffering and conflict. This part of Maharaj's teaching, that our faulty vision always leads to contradiction, can even be extrapolated to the realm of science. There it has been found that on the most fundamental level our probings consistently end in paradox, which has forced scientists to re-examine their original assumptions about the nature of the Universe. More and more, they have had to abandon their notion about the existence of discrete entities, such as indicated by the term "particles." It now appears that the underlying realities in physics are events and processes—and that there exists nothing which has "identity" as we are used to in our thinking.

However lofty the teaching may be, Maharaj always had his feet planted firmly on the ground. Unlike the majority of spiritual teachers, Maharaj had been a householder and businessman for a good part of his life, and this may well have had something to do with it. Take for example his position on consistency. Absolute consistency cannot realistically be expected, he averred, not even from a Master like himself. Once, when challenged about some minor inconsistency in his behavior which a visitor seemed to perceive, Maharaj dismissed the subject as follows: "You think absolute consistency is possible,

prove it by example. Do not preach what you do not practice."

In a similar vein Maharaj expressed himself about utopian visions, dismissing all speculation about the so-called "betterment" of the world as just that, idle speculation, and, what is more, irrelevant, because it is not real. In this connection, Maharaj stated:

The world (your world) had all the time to get better. It has not. What hope is there for the future? Of course, there have been and will be periods of harmony and peace when *sattva** is in ascendance. But things get destroyed by their own perfection. A perfect society is necessarily static and, therefore, it stagnates and decays. From the summit all roads lead downwards. Societies are like people—they are born, they grow to some point of relative perfection and then decay and die. (p. 419)

Maharaj's main thrust is obviously that such matters do not concern us and also to bring us back to the here-and-now, which is all that ever exists. We must forget about "evolution" in the spiritual life—the very terms in this phrase are mutually contradictory—and deal only with what *is*. Evolution, the idea that we need time for our liberation, is a dodge by the intellect to sidetrack the issue, to be allowed to continue with the dream. Evolution may have some relevance in the realm of science or philosophy, but not in that of the spirit—the timeless and spaceless.

There is so much more to Maharaj's teaching, both in scope and subtlety, that one could go on forever commenting on its unique quality. Better, therefore, to refer the reader to the record of Maharaj's conversations such as given in *I Am That*, and let the aphorisms given in Part II of this volume speak for themselves.

I am very much obliged to Mr. Milo Clark of La Jolla, California, for permission to reproduce the following account. Mr. Clark spent over a month with Maharaj in Bombay in late 1978 and early 1979, and during this period he made meticulous notes of his observations. Notwithstanding the fact that some may well find this a bit of trivia in relation to the sublime nature of the teaching, I make no apology for including this

* Being, true essence; the quality of purity or goodness.

rather lengthy, colorful and highly detailed account of Maharaj's intimate surroundings by a most perceptive participant in the goings-on. For the point is that it does give one a good feel of how one enlightened sage spent his days and in what kind of environment. It brings something that may be quite alien to most people closer to home, as it were.

A Day with Maharaj

by Milo Clark

"Maharaj," to me, was just a temporal title of an Indian potentate until I met this lineage holder of a spiritual title,* which, in this man's case suggests nothing regal, encompassing no estates, grants no domain. His physical circumstances are very simple yet apparently lacking nothing to him. The bulk of his being is entrusted to a small room, perhaps 10 by 15 feet in size, and filled with objects related to his being there as Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. The entitlement brought no affectations, only some objects related to the lineage which he did not seek. Along with the other tenants of Vanmali Bhavan (the name of the building on Tenth Lane in the Khetwadi district of Bombay, where Maharaj lives with his family), he walks down the long hall to the far end of the building to use the communal toilet facilities. With a mischievous twinkle rarely absent from his unusually bright eyes, he scoffs at all the guru business and trappings. With a sweeping wave of his hands, he says that when he goes about he is just an old man out for a walk so nobody bothers him and he can go as he pleases.

Maharaj, as most of the Westerners in attendance called him, holds court in his little room much of the day and evening. The room is reached by a small, steep ladder which looks like a fold-up attic ladder from the Indian equivalent of Sears Roebuck. He will be found near the top—to the right side in the morning and to the left later in the day. On approaching a spiritual master of a Hindu tradition, one customarily touches head to floor in respect for the tradition bearer. Given the space involved and the immediate proximity of Maharaj to the top of the ladder, a rather adept maneuver is required to bring this

*A succession of gurus, the Navnath Sampradeya, has existed for centuries, originating with the legendary Rishi Dattatreya. The last nine rishis of the succession are easily identified; they were all householders, engaged in farming and trading. The last in the succession was Maharaj. —*Compiler*

off with some sense of grace and proportion. A visitor learns to keep legs in the stairwell and to execute the bow on emerging. Any alternative method requires a suppleness of spine worthy of an inchworm.

The space is no more than six feet high and was created many years ago by dividing the front room of this two-room suite in half vertically. There are numerous opportunities to impale one's head. A heavy central beam, at least six by six inches, has three heavy hooks for hanging large bells during ceremonies. On the side of the beam facing Tenth Lane, there is a metal rod, perhaps half an inch in diameter, extending from one side of the room to another. From this rod, at its easternmost end toward the outside wall of Vanmali Bhavan, hangs a heavy brass bell with a base diameter of about six inches. This bell would swell the chest of any respectable yachtsman. We shall hear more about this later.

I do not know how long Maharaj has been in this space, but it feels like a very long time. Maybe as long as 50 years, since this is also the location of his beedie shop, now boarded up below, which was his business before his spiritual enlightenment and, I understand, for some years afterwards. Beedies are very potent Indian cigarettes with an acrid, quite vile-smelling smoke. They are made by rolling some crumbled tobacco in a small leaf finished off with a wisp of colored string which also clues the addict as to which end to light while holding the whole thing together. In honor of his former trade or, perhaps more accurately, in testimony to the addictive powers of the beedie, Maharaj chain-smokes the little devils. It was hinted that Maharaj still helps out on beedie rolling now and then. His son carries on the family trade in a tiny alcove shop just down the alley to the east before the tea shop on the corner.

Maharaj states his age (at the time of my visit) as 82 years of suffering in this body. He says so or, more correctly, is translated as having said so in his native Marathi, with a wry smile and toss of his eyebrows, hinting that it may not have been all that bad.

The room has a patina and shine coming from much rubbing and wiping on its objects and surfaces. The floor is covered with a collection of rugs and carpets typical of the "as-is" section of a Goodwill store. My guess, nevertheless, is that a shrewd rug merchant would be delighted with some of them.

There are two low windows, one to the south facing Tenth Lane and the other in the eastern wall about two thirds back into the room. This latter opening is to a narrow space between buildings. The view includes a bit of rusted-through, corrugated roofing fallen from the adjacent building, some crumbling masonry, and various metal-reinforcing rods festooned with bits of cloth of indeterminate ancestry and circumstance. The windows are masked on the inside by heavy wire mesh. Both walls, what little is uncovered, and wire mesh were painted the same bilious green once dear to American hospitals. On opposite sides of the room about three feet or so back from the front wall along the longer side walls are two quite old appearing but once fine mirrors now losing their silvering here and there. By carefully placing oneself, there are reflections of a multitude of self-images.

At the far interior end of the room is a wooden case and chest of drawers laden with important-looking articles and secret recesses containing items for ceremonies and Maharaj's personal needs. Toward the side and above the low windows can be found a set of cushions, a backrest and two folded animal skins lined with velvet cloth. I have not seen this group of articles used during my visits, and sense that these were used during the late-night sessions, which were attended primarily by Maharaj's Indian devotees and conducted in Marathi with no translation offered.

By the center of the wall, also on top of the case mentioned above, is an elaborate (for these circumstances) altar arrangement backed by a large, silver-framed picture of a stern-visaged Indian of apparent importance garbed in a richly decorated uniform of Western cut. My impression was that this was a previous lineage holder of the Maharaj title now held by Nisargadatta. The altar itself has many silver pieces of differing sizes and shapes. A small flame burns continuously in a tall stand centered on the picture. There are two impressive lions on duty flanking the altar and heavy drapings along the edges of the frame. The base and panels are deeply embossed silver of complex designs and reliefs. There is no doubt that this altar arrangement holds significance to those who regularly attend Maharaj in this space.

Around the perimeter, in those areas not occupied by mirrors, altar and throne cushions, a wainscoting runs along about

four feet above the floor. Oh, yes, I must also mention two formidable oil paintings of the current Maharaj. One is placed to the interior side of the altar arrangement mentioned. Under this portrait and between the altar case and a big dark wooden armoire is a tiny square of floor that became my refuge and support during the painful hours spent on that hard floor. The second portrait hangs on the interior (western) wall between the mirror and the front wall. Against the opposite wall lies a pile of cushions. Upon and above the wainscoting is a collection of framed representations of human faces and bodies, mostly photographs of various vintages. I recognized several that would be of Maharaj, and one of Ramana Maharshi. Another, more a drawing than a photograph (but who is to know?), conveys the impression of Babaji, the Avatar dear to Yogananda (Founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship). The others were unknown to me and ranged from additional figures in fancy dress similar to the distinguished gentleman over the altar to those in simple dhoti or loincloth pictured in various yogic poses with faces composed in samadhi or spiritual rest. When, during a slack moment, I ventured to ask the translator whom some of these visages may represent, Maharaj (who purports to know no English) sternly wagged his finger at me, fixed me with one of his dark looks of great import and let loose a torrent of words which were translated as, "When you know who *you* are, you will know who *they* are!" That was followed instantly, if not simultaneously—so quick are his changes—by the kind of merry twinkle old Saint Nick is supposed to have given before laying finger to nose and disappearing up the chimney with a "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night."

Minor details abound. There is a trap door with counterweight which folds up to the interior wall. Above the trap door is a small railing to warn the unwary. At the head of the ladder, high on the wall right under the central beam, is a round, brass-cased doorbell button. This button, when pushed, rings a buzzer down in the living quarters below. Maharaj, at the start of bhajans (the chanting ceremonies), would stalk about the room banging cymbals mightily and glaring at the head of the ladder in expectation of the desired attendance of his family. They would hardly ever put in an appearance, but Maharaj would scowl and go over to push many times upon the button. Sometimes his daughter would come up and join in and, satisfied,

Maharaj would go back to intent concentration on his cymbals.

To the front left are some small shelves with items related to housekeeping. You should also know that Maharaj sleeps in this room. The pile of cushions in the eastern corner conceals the bedding and frame which are brought out and assembled by his daughter for afternoon nap and nighttime sleep. And, on the two window sills, both about eight inches deep (the thickness of the walls), are flower vases, water pitchers, metal stands, trays and ashtrays. Yes, holy ashtrays (sounds like something from "L'il Orphan Annie" or "Batman" comics). Maharaj's endless succession of beedies comes out of a silver box kept by his side. The silver looks almost worn through to the wood of the box. He seemingly is involved with lighting a beedie or new stick of incense almost all the time. He used one of those Ronson type coffee-table butane lighters (given to him by some admirer) with a childlike fascination in its workings yet carried off with a casual aplomb. I was there during a better part of the year, I was told, yet the air in Bombay, at least during my visit, averaged a stage-two smog alert by Los Angeles standards. Maharaj carefully keeps ten or more sticks of incense burning from his seven incense holders. His favorites seemed to be "pacholi" and "Mt. Everest." At times other than discourses—i.e., bhajans, readings, puja (worship)—additional incense would be lit before the altar and at other places in the room. As though that were not enough, ritual camphor was burned at least three times daily. All of this contributes richly to the patina constantly applied and dutifully rubbed. Needless to say, the reek of Maharaj's omnipresent beedies was well camouflaged.

Maharaj's day begins very early with orthodox Hindu ceremonies attended primarily by his Indian devotees. About 8:00 a.m., he supervises meditation for an hour to an hour and a half. Then comes the first bhajans of the day. Women and men are separated along some invisible lines created to fit the occasion by Maharaj, which he will imperiously enforce with much motioning and posturing until everyone is arranged to his liking. This room is his territory and let no one forget that. Over a period of time, however, it becomes clear that he will change the rules frequently to fit the circumstances as he sees them.

Bhajans start with selections chanted from a small book in (I assume) Hindi, but maybe Marathi. I have heard the rhythms

before and, now and then, recognize some familiar phrases so that I can join in with words as well as sound. Next there are readings from, first, a very thick old leather-bound book; then, a slightly smaller volume; and finally, a small and quite thin little book with a paper cover such as a school child might use. The readings are very pleasant to the ear, and the intent is clear even if the words are not. After readings, more chanting. During the chanting, the women are clustered to the back of the room and allowed to participate from memory. They are given access neither to the books nor to the impressive collection of cymbals brought out from a chest hidden by the bed frame and distributed to the men to use.

Bhajans with Maharaj was a deeply moving time. Imagine this little room with its sooty low ceiling and eight-inch thick walls stuffed with people singing mightily and pounding cymbals and bells with some force. The build-up of sound pressure forces something vital to happen. Never forget that big bell hanging from the central beam and the three large hooks folded up against the beam. During bhajans, one of these hooks gets a much bigger brass bell. The chest also gives up some big brass plates, which are ritually smashed with mallets to add to the whole process.

Now we start. Chanting, hand cymbals, rhythms led by some of the Indian devotees and accented by Maharaj who gets the biggest cymbals. After a lot of working along through some heavy verse, interspersed with an occasional, vehement “Jai Gurul,”* someone takes away Maharaj’s larger cymbals to replace them with the very largest ones. Simultaneously, up goes the big bell, and two devotees of some distinction go to work with great enthusiasm to keep the Queen Mary safe in heavy fog. Various other gongs and bongers appear to add to the wondrous cacophony. Something explodes in the middle of my skull, and the rocket ship takes off. The climax of Beethoven’s Ninth played at maximum volume barely comes close to this three times daily concatenation in Maharaj’s tiny room.

But there are other, no less awesome moments in a day with Maharaj. Discourses begin with Maharaj pointing an imperious finger at some hapless victim. But, first, we should arrange the room again, which takes quite a bit of time between sessions. In

*“Hail to the Gurul” in the Hindi language.

the morning everything is cleared from the floor except for a vase of tall flowers placed about two thirds of the way toward the front—in men’s territory. Also, in front of the rear side window is placed a silver stand with a reading rack and some other things. Books are stacked on the side. The reader sits on a lower silver platform between the case and the bookstand table. Maharaj’s seven incense burners and their tray are here, too.

In the early stages of morning bhajans, Maharaj will often go downstairs to read the newspaper or attend to whatever occupies him during the readings. On his return, he bustles about stoking up the altar and seven incense burners, trims the wick on the oil lamp in front of the big picture over the altar, changes bowls on the altar, and fusses with this and that until it meets his satisfaction. When the time is right, he goes over near the doorbell button at the head of the trap door and hits another button which produces four loud rings. Back across the room, he gets his smaller set of biggest cymbals and starts in.

If anyone has a garland for him, this is the time to present it. Some also go up to put flowers between his toes and to kiss or touch his feet, in classic Hindu obeisance. Maharaj stands through it all with a slightly disapproving look. In comments at other times, Maharaj says that he goes along with the orthodox Hindu rituals, since that is the custom and he belongs to the tradition. The garlands are usually taken off immediately and handed to one of the retainers, with a gesture indicating which picture is to be graced with the offering. That done, we really get with the bhajans.

After morning bhajans, there is a half-hour break to rearrange the room for morning discourses, a period of teaching, question and answer, show and tell with Maharaj. During this time, the Westerners tend to congregate in the corner tea shop for cha, or chai, the Indian potion composed of the dregs from the tea harvest mixed with milk and copious amounts of sugar. Cha is to English breakfast tea as beedie is to Pell Mell. When we come back, the floor is cleared and Maharaj is in morning position under the mirror on the interior wall facing east and barely away from the trap door opening as people come and go during discourses. The translator is next to him, as a rule, even closer to the opening, although sometimes the translators will sit elsewhere toward the front and eastern side. Then, with men arranged to the west and women to the east, or vice versa,

depending upon whatever logic governs at the time, discourses begin. The finger is pointed.

Maharaj's message is always the same. Maharaj says that he and Krishna are the same. In context, that statement implies that what he has to say had already been stated in myriads of ways and thence interpreted, analyzed and commented upon way beyond the capacity of one's intellect to absorb. Once the mind games were surrendered, then whatever one needed to know would be known. Although the message may be the same, the process of arriving at it varied with the person selected for the moment's play. Maharaj delights in the play of words, personalities and languages. He is animated and speaks quite rapidly as a rule. Sometimes he goes into long speeches. Other times he gestures, points, bounces up and down, grimaces, chortles, harrumphs, fusses, coughs or grabs at something or someone within range to illustrate his point. The contents of this consummate actor's bag of tricks and his range of expression seem limitless.

His translators vary in capacity, but almost always someone of quite good English comes along. The main variation is in the type of English spoken. At the top of my comprehension scale are two of the translators, one man and one woman, who have a very broad capability to use idioms and accents from both American English and British English. Then come several other translators whose competence is limited to Indian English. This takes some getting used to, especially since it is spoken very rapidly with a wonderful mush-mouth quality. There are clear indications of pecking order among the translators. The two most competent linguistically are also most competent otherwise in Maharaj's view, since he allows them considerable latitude in interpreting his comments. Others are subjected to critical comments and corrections by Maharaj, who seems to understand English very well but will not speak a word of it. The international character of the audience leads to frequent forays into other languages, too. A comment can go from Marathi to English to Spanish to French to Italian to Polish before getting around the room, although this is rarely the case. Now and then, long exchanges go on in local languages which are not translated, only summarized.

Maharaj's rural upbringing and earlier adult years spent in this district as a beedie merchant have colored his speech with,

I am told confidentially, an earthy and even bawdy manner. After a while, the twinkle in his eyes and the rapid changes in color of the translator's faces under the dark Indian skins would hint at the graphic nature of his comments. The translators would gulp and scan their minds for some way to exorcise that comment before passing it on. The contrast between the Krishna of contemporary ultra-puritanical Hinduism and the earthy aspects of the Gopi stories of sensuous abandon and celebration from earlier Hindu tradition is brought to mind in Maharaj's earthy style. After all, he says with that raunchy twinkle, he and Krishna are one.

Maharaj has a great sense of humor, and he delights in little puns and games. His mostly toothless face lights up and plunges to dark depths in instants. He makes more faces than a clown or mime could generate. He can work on someone who is deaf, dumb and blind with compassionate patience, as he did one American woman whose pilgrimage to India seemed to require lecturing Maharaj on subtle points of Sanskrit and Hindu doctrine. Her every sentence began with, "Yes, but . . ." He would work and work with her, going along each of her lines of thought and always coming back to the same simple point of *Advaita*, which is the very essence of his teaching. With others, he cuts right in and heavily if he does not like the answer. He does not wait for translation either. During my first days with him, he asked me frequently if I had any questions. Once he said that I should play flint and steel with him, because from that kind of friction comes a spark and he likes sparks.

His handling of people as they come along was instructive. Whenever a new head would appear at the top of the ladder, Maharaj would usually ask what brought them here. The replies varied, of course, but generally contained some variant of, "I came to see you." On more than one occasion he would curtly reply, "You have seen me, you can go now." Others would be told to stay until he said they could leave, or that 2, 5, 15 or some other number of days was how long they should remain. As my indefinite stay lengthened, I found my niche between the altar case and the armoire and settled in there for meditation on "All this is the Self and I am That." I paid less attention to the translations per se and more to Maharaj's being. He would shock me awake now and then with a summons for grilling and instruction on some particular point. I was reading

the Bhagavad Gita daily. Invariably, he would make a point of speaking directly about the verses I had worked on that day. Others reported the same thing. He would speak directly on whatever they happened to be studying at the time.

Each day, year round, year after year, Maharaj followed a routine taking him from early morning to late at night in the service of his teaching. Yet, within this routine, he seemed always open, always fluid. The evening of our Christmas Day 1978 was very different and, yet, totally within his context. All in all, it was an open, relatively unstructured period. There were few Indians present and those that were there were familiar faces. There was Jenny, Australian, but mostly in England for the past five years; Jean, French; myself; a younger Indian couple who were very casual and comfortable with Maharaj; an older, garrulous Indian gentleman, and the also older Indian gentleman whom I called "Keeper of the Faith." The younger Indian man was translating with some help from his wife, whom Maharaj clearly doted upon, with some occasional vehement interjections from the older, garrulous Indian gentleman.

Early in the session, a group of Indians (two couples and one small boy) came. They had not been there before and were just shopping, I guess. The little boy, without being bothersome, got into being a little boy and the translator suggested that he be taken below. Shortly thereafter, the group picks up to go with ritual bowing, foot touching and such, which Maharaj barely tolerated. The men shuffle around in their pockets for some money to leave. Having settled on whatever they thought appropriate, a bunch of bills is offered to Maharaj who scowls, waves his hands about in disdain, takes the money and jabs it back at them. There is a shattering moment of confusion and disbelief among the visitors, while the translator insists that Maharaj never takes money just for people being there. So, the visitors take the money back and leave in disarray.

Then the quality of the session changed radically; the rather young translator seemed to enjoy Maharaj's confidence, and, as mentioned above, his very beautiful wife (Radha incarnate) was a favorite of Maharaj. Both were free to make interpretations and comments without interference from him. The discussion slowly changed from the question-and-answer format between Maharaj and individuals to an open exchange among the group, which Maharaj orchestrated and enjoyed much. Jean is

trying very hard to get through Marathi and English to French. Jenny and I try to suggest French words, and Maharaj would indicate which ones he thought appropriate. He would rattle off a vehement string of words and point out this or that person to try to translate (without the translator's intervention) into English or French, and then coach us through like a game of charade. The time ran on rapidly and the older Indian gentlemen got into quite a tizzy with Jean, with much gesturing, pointing, very rapid Indian English (which has got to be a third language), laughing and grabbing. Everybody gets into the act and Maharaj is very involved in the whole thing. Meanwhile, Keeper of the Faith was getting nervous about the time for bhajans passing. Maharaj was studiously ignoring him. According to my plan, I was to leave for Madras the next morning (unaware that I would be back in Bombay four days hence for my second and longer visit with Maharaj). I told the translator how much I admired the big ship's bells and that I collected bells at home.

Later, when Keeper of the Faith prevailed and the small group present begins bhajans, there is a very different quality to the session. Jean, who usually holds back during bhajans, comes in strongly and Maharaj gets into an exchange with him on setting the rhythms. We get a bit syncopated. Keeper of the Faith frowns strongly, but then surrenders to the beat. When bell ringing time comes, Maharaj assigns me to the bigger brass bell. Keeper of the Faith is shocked, but, with him leading on the other big bell, we get it going at a high level and he once again finds himself enjoying the whole thing. Bhajans went around twice that evening, and I shall never again have trouble with being in Bhakti ananda (devotional bliss).

Another incident earlier that evening says much about Maharaj, I feel. On my first stay, I quickly got into the habit of stopping at a stand on the way to Tenth Lane to get some fruit or flowers for offering, that being my understanding of Hindu tradition to honor the guru with flowers and provide something for prasada, or offering. The room is full of flowers and garlands, so it must please people to give them. He takes the flowers, makes some little fuss over them (very little) before handing them to his daughter or one of the Indians with orders about which vase or place to put them — the logic of which I cannot discern, if there be any. For the evening session on

Christmas Day, which I thought would be my last day with him, I cast about for something more personal to give to him, something which would please me more. I came upon a small stuffed heart sent to me by a dear friend for a Christmas present in India, which had touched me deeply. I was sure the sender would be as delighted to give it to Maharaj as I was. I was under no illusion that it would make any real difference to Maharaj, the difference was only to me. I wanted to make as little as possible of it, in any case, and just slip it to him on leaving. I also bought some sugar candy for prasad.

When I arrived, no one else had arrived. We were alone there. I gave him the sugar candy for prasad and the heart. He took both, gestured the question whether the candy was prasad, which I acknowledged. The heart, he turned around and upside down and squeezed before putting it on his little table next to the beedie box and lighter. Later, when the young couple came who were to translate, he picked up the heart and let out a long stream of Marathi which was translated as, "He asks, what is this?" I replied, "It is only a heart shape." Rhada incarnate asks, "Is it yours?" and I say, "Of course." She then explained that everything is the same to Maharaj, but that he recognizes that all things presented to him are not the same to the donor. When they are seen as the same by the donor, the latter is closer to realizing the I AM consciousness. I understood.

There is a pert little lady, maybe 11 years old, who is Maharaj's granddaughter. She brings a special light to his eyes whenever she comes up. She orders him around for this and that, and he mock-meekly complies in a little game all their own. The next time she stuck her head up the trap door, he called her over and gave her the heart which she seemed to like very much, and the cycle completed itself very nicely to my mind.

As mentioned, I was unaware that I would soon be back for more. During the second, much longer stay, I ceased trying to fix attention on concepts or put symbols to words translated. I simply tuned in, and thoughts formed and passed as they would. Every once in a while he confirms where I am and puts me through whatever he puts me through for the place of ignorance I am in at the moment.

One evening a lightning bolt of comprehension hit, much fell

into place and I spent the balance of my time there well focused on my "mantra": All This is the Self and I am That.

Maharaj says he has never seen God and knows nothing of those things about which religions make so much. For him, truth is truth in any costume and he entertains no concepts about God, only the reality of "I am That." Yet, he will go on at great length spouting concepts and Sanskrit names triggered by a question. After he has demolished both the question and the questioner with concepts, he will tell a story or give an example demolishing himself and his most recently espoused concepts. The message is always clear that there is nothing but what *is*, and what *is*, is whatever your mind/body creates for itself so long as you refuse to give it all up. He says that once you know yourself and are neither attached nor detached to your actions, whatever you do will be right.

I understand.

Biographical Details

Not too much is known about Maharaj's personal life, especially the part before he became a spiritual teacher. For one thing, he never assigned it the slightest importance, and for another, Maharaj lived the life of the average Indian working man and householder—quite unlike the typical guru. The following is therefore a bare outline, although some further details are given in *I Am That* (First American Edition by The Acorn Press, Durham, North Carolina, 1982).

Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj was born in Bombay, March 1897 (the date is not certain), and was brought up in Kandalgaon, a village south of Bombay. He was given the name Maruti. Both his parents were very religious, in the orthodox sense. As a boy, Maruti helped his father, who was a small farmer, with various farming chores. The father died in 1915, leaving behind his widow, Maruti, and his three brothers and two sisters.

In 1924 Maruti married, from which marriage were born a son and three daughters. Maruti, after some time clerking in an office, opened a shop where he sold children's clothing, tobacco, and hand-made cigarettes (so-called "beedies"). Later, he operated several more shops of a similar type.

From a young age, the boy had shown a keen interest in everything that went on around him. Early in his childhood and later, as a businessman, Maruti had made friends with men of strong spiritual inclination. His many discussions on religion and philosophical topics with these men sharpened his inquisitive mind and kindled a spiritual fire in him. At the age of 34, he met his Guru and by 37 he had realized himself, whereupon Maruti took the name Nisargadatta. In *I Am That*, in answer to a question, a very potent description is given of this transformation, which found him "whole," needing nothing anymore.

The Master's Death

On Tuesday, September 8, 1981, at 7:30 in the evening, Sri

Nisargadatta Maharaj passed away peacefully at his abode in Bombay. A special bulletin issued after his death read partly as follows:

11 a.m. on Wednesday the 9th of September heralded thousands of devotees singing the Lord's praise, headed by an exquisitely decorated lorry and filled with fresh, fragrant garlands, wherein was serenely seated Sri Maharaj. All around him were roses and garlands and devotees. The procession slowly wended its way to Bangange headed by a musical band and dancing devotees.

This is another day for joy, since wisdom never dies but remains as a fresh spring.

Maharaj left behind a son and a daughter—his wife and two other daughters having preceded him in death.

Epitaph

What is the significance of the event of September 8, 1981? For those who accept the world appearance as real, who identify themselves with a body and see other bodies as other selves, death is always an unmitigated calamity. Holding each creature to be an independent entity that has an existence separate from the rest of the Universe, death is evil itself, and cannot logically be anything else. For them, Maharaj *was*, and is no more—the end of a cruelly destructive process.

For those who understand the essence of his teaching and perceive the manifold names and shapes that in their totality make up the world as a mere apparition, without inherent substance, *Maruti* died—not in 1981, but many years before, at the time he took the name Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. And they know that, having died once, he cannot die again. For them, Maharaj *is*. Maybe, that day in September occasioned a certain sadness—not for Maharaj's sake, however, but for their own. For did not Maharaj once state: "... pity the living, never the dead." Most importantly, they know where to search for their beloved Maharaj at any time—in the heart, for he is no other than their very Self.

There can be no common ground between these two entirely opposite views. One of the purposes of this book is to present the reader with a clear choice in the matter, so that he may be

able to decide what kind of world he wishes to create for himself and others.



Mr. S. Dikshit, in his Preface to the Second Edition of *I Am That*, writes, "Any of these two volumes, any single talk, any single page of the book may show the reader the path to the Supreme Bliss!" I would like to take this one step further by adding: Any single paragraph, any of Maharaj's aphorisms, may jolt the reader sufficiently to wake him up from his dream of unreality! It all depends whether one is prepared to dig deep enough. In this connection, Maharaj says so pointedly: "To find water you do not dig small pits all over the place, but drill deep in one place only." (p. 202)

The total body of Maharaj's published teachings, although substantial, is not as large as that of certain other spiritual teachers. Therefore, some people are hoping that further discourses by Maharaj will be unearthed. Although such finds would represent exciting discoveries, to this writer it is much more important at this stage to make the most of the material that Frydman has so painstakingly recorded and translated into English. Maybe, if properly digested and taken to heart, the need for ever studying additional texts will then be seen in quite a different light. This would be in accordance with the vertical rather than the horizontal approach to the subject matter, always emphasized by Maharaj.

In Part II, I present a compilation of Sri Nisargadatta's aphorisms based upon *I Am That*. Not only does each of these contain a depth of wisdom, but collectively they represent a concise statement of basic aspects of Maharaj's teaching. Wherever possible, I have grouped the aphorisms together in such a way as to highlight their interrelatedness, thus increasing their significance as a teaching tool.

Part II

Sayings that May Turn Your Life Around

**Gems from
Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj's Conversations**

[Compiler's annotations in small typeface.]

In my world there is community, insight, love, real quality; the individual is the total, the totality is in the individual. All are one and the One is all.



To remember what needs to be remembered is the secret of success. You come to it through earnestness.



Knowing the world to be a part of myself, I pay it no more attention than you pay to the food you have eaten.

We are bound to the world, because of our overwhelming interest in it. Yet, we created that world ourselves in the first place, through imagination. In our ignorance, we regard the world as though it were something outside and apart from ourselves and as though this interest, this knowledge, could enrich

us. We must learn to shift our focus of attention from the world to the very phenomenon of our interest in it.



Mind is interested in what happens, while awareness is interested in the mind itself. The child is after the toy, but the mother watches the child, not the toy.

If you truly love a child, you will want to understand him; and in order to understand him, you have to observe his behavior with the least possible intervention. Similarly, if you wish to be free, you need to know how the mind ever produces its own bondage. For this, the mind must be under close and constant surveillance. Just like the child's toy was of no importance in understanding him, so any one particular thought is of no importance in understanding the mind as a whole. To be "absorbed" or "lost" in such thought content is like being caught off guard: one stops being an impartial observer of the general mechanism of the mind.



To lose entirely all interest in knowledge results in omniscience.



Once you know your mind and its miraculous powers, and remove what poisoned it—the idea of a separate and isolated person—you just leave it alone to do its work among things for which it is well suited. To keep the mind in its own place and on its own work is the liberation of the mind.



When you demand nothing of the world, nor of God, when you want nothing, seek nothing, expect nothing, then the Supreme State will come to you uninvited and unexpected!



Forget the known, but remember that you are the knower. Don't be all the time immersed in your experiences. Remember that you are beyond the experiencer, ever unborn and deathless.



Remember, you cannot abandon what you do not know. To go beyond yourself, you must know yourself.

That which one does not know, does not understand, continues to haunt one, to stir the mind. On the other hand, once something is fully understood you naturally leave it alone, and it leaves you alone; it has been adequately dealt with and so is finished. A close connection exists with the question of the conscious and the subconscious. The subconscious, being the depository of the not-understood and the half-understood, acts as the psychological motor of the persona. To expose the mind's recesses to awareness is to empty the subconscious of its contents, and is an essential part of the process of self-exploration. It is absolutely vital for leaving behind the patterns of thought, desire, and all forms of habituation that collectively make up the little self (i.e., the ego). J. Krishnamurti has said much the same thing when he describes how any psychological residue of ill-digested thought or experience perpetuates the mind's restless activity, creating ever new thought and preventing the peaceful state when thought is in abidance and there is an opportunity for clear vision.



Earnestness is not a yearning for the fruits of one's endeavors. It is an expression of an inner shift of interest away from the false, the unessential, the personal.

In other words, the desire for liberation is of a different order than desire as normally defined. In fact, "desire," in this context may be an altogether wrong term, because of its common associations. Generally, the word implies a movement towards gratification induced by one's background, whereas "earnestness" implies a movement away from the usual gratification or end-seeking because there has been an insight into its mechanicalness and meaninglessness. Such a movement, which is independent of one's background, is also driven by an entirely different kind of energy. Whereas our ordinary desire for this or

that may be said to be a horizontal movement in time, the movement of earnestness is seen as a vertical one—from the world of space-time into timelessness—and is necessarily always accompanied by insight. Maybe, we should invent a new word for this process. See also Maharaj's following statement.



The desire for truth is the best of all desires, yet it is still a desire. All desires must be given up for the real to be. Remember that you are. This is your working capital. Rotate it and there will be much profit.



A man who claims to know what is good for others, is dangerous.

Do-gooders of the world: take heed!



There can be no consciousness without awareness, but there can be awareness without consciousness, as in deep sleep.

Consciousness is its contents; awareness has no contents but is

that which makes consciousness possible. One might also say that consciousness is to awareness what computer or "machine intelligence" is to the computer programmer's intelligence.



Consciousness does not shine by itself. It shines by a light beyond it.



The mind must learn that beyond the moving mind there is the background of awareness which does not change. The mind must come to know the true self and respect it and cease covering it up, like the moon which obscures the sun during solar eclipse.



While the mind is centered in the body, and consciousness is centered in the mind, awareness is free. The body has its urges and mind its pains and pleasures. Awareness is unattached and unshaken. It is lucid, silent, peaceful, alert and unafraid, without desire and fear. Meditate on it as your true being and try to be it in your daily life, and you shall realize it in its fullness.



Awareness becomes consciousness when it has an object. The object changes all the time. In consciousness there is movement; awareness by itself is motionless and timeless, here and now.

As we have seen on the previous pages, Maharaj distinguishes between awareness and consciousness. The former is absolute; the latter is relative to its content and has a subject.

The world is as illusory as the images of a movie projection; as against the transitoriness of the images projected, the awareness (the light) is constant and real.



All consciousness is limited and therefore painful. At the root of consciousness lies desire, the urge to experience.



The world is but a succession of experiences and you are what makes them conscious, and yet remain beyond all experience. It is like the heat, the flame and the burning wood. The heat maintains the flame, the flame consumes the wood. Without heat, there would be neither flame nor fuel. Similarly, without awareness there would

be no consciousness, nor life, which transforms matter into a vehicle of consciousness.



Names and shapes change incessantly. Know yourself to be the changeless witness of the changeful mind. That is enough.

Thus, name and shape (*nama-rupa*)—being transitory and arbitrarily defined—cannot be our identity; that which underlies *nama-rupa* is.



When you understand that names and shapes are hollow shells without any content whatsoever, and what is real is nameless and formless, pure energy of life and light of consciousness, you will be at peace—immersed in the deep silence of reality.



Remembering yourself is virtue, forgetting yourself is sin.



To nourish the ideas: “I am a sinner, I am not a sinner,” is sin. To identify oneself with the particular is all the sin there is. The impersonal is real, the personal appears and disappears.

To see distinctions or discriminate on a psychological level, involving value judgments—which is to create duality and thereby illusion—is the only sin, for from it originates all evil, all sorrow in the world. Sin is fundamental Ignorance, which ever gives rise to *Maya* (Unreality, Illusion).



If you want to sin, sin wholeheartedly and openly. Sins too have their lessons to teach the earnest sinner, as virtues the earnest saint. It is the mixing up of the two that is so disastrous. Nothing can block you so effectively as compromise, for it shows lack of earnestness, without which nothing can be done.

“Sin” is not used here in any fundamental sense, as in the previous two statements. What Maharaj seems to say is that wishy-washyness may be the greatest enemy of the spiritual life.



The entire purpose of a clean and well-ordered life is to liberate man from the thralldom of chaos and the burden of sorrow.



By being clear about confusion, you become clear of confusion.



The world and the mind are states of being. The supreme is not a state. It pervades all states, but it is not a state of something else.



When you are free of the world, you can do something about it.

Being part of the world, one is part of this wave of confusion and whatever one does leads to more confusion and misery.



Correct your attitude to your body and leave it alone. Don't pamper, don't torture. Just keep it going, most of the time below the threshold of conscious attention.

One might call this the Middle Way: neither indulgence nor

asceticism, either of which draws attention and energy away from the Essential.



Nothing of value can happen to a mind which knows exactly what it wants.

All true meaningfulness, all that has real value, is utterly beyond the mind's reach.



Desire the good of all and the universe will work with you. But if you want your own pleasure, you must earn it the hard way. Before desiring, deserve.

To "desire the good of all" would be a first step toward seeing things in an impersonal way and going beyond the demands of the little self. But in this we must be absolutely clear about our motives, in order not to deceive ourselves.



All kinds of experience may come to you—remain unmoved in the knowledge that all perceivable is transient, and only the "I am" endures.



Those who know only scriptures know nothing.
To know is to *be*.



Your own self is your ultimate teacher. The outer teacher is merely a milestone. It is only your inner teacher that will walk with you to the goal, for he *is* the goal.



In your world I would be most miserable. To wake up, to eat, to talk, to sleep again—what a bother!

Does Maharaj imply that life is futile, and it is preferable to commit suicide? Is there any essential meaningfulness in anything one does? Maharaj, it seems, unmistakably points to the boredom and futility of the little pleasures, the routine existence, in short all that most of us can look forward to, and how we miss thereby the joy of that extra dimension which comes from living in the essential, flowing with life instead of battling it, resulting in a rich, full, meaningful life every moment of one's existence.

The perceptive reader may notice that Maharaj's statement bears also upon this whole question of living and dying, and particularly upon the so-called "will to live," which always goes hand in hand with the fear of dying. The above should be read in conjunction with Maharaj's next two statements.



To be a living being is not the ultimate state: there is something beyond, much more wonderful, which is neither being nor non-being, neither living nor not-living. It is a state of pure awareness, beyond the limitations of space and time. Once the illusion that the body-mind is oneself is abandoned, death loses its terror, it becomes a part of living.



The very desire to live is the messenger of death, just as the longing to be happy is the outline of sorrow.



Delayed response is wrong response. Thought, feeling and action must be one and simultaneous with the situation that calls for them.

Compare this with J. Krishnamurti's "action without idea": there exists an action which is not a re-action, but a totally spontaneous movement which is not time-bound because it is not dependent upon knowledge (memory).



My experience is that everything is bliss. But the desire for bliss creates pain. Thus bliss becomes the seed of pain. The entire universe of pain is born of desire. Give up the desire for pleasure and you will not even know what pain is.

Reality is bliss, but mind-thought (desire) is ever the spoiler.



This must be well grasped: the world hangs on the thread of consciousness: no consciousness, no world.

We think there is consciousness within the world—but no, the world only is within consciousness: nothing exists outside it.



To know the world you forget the self—to know the self you forget the world.

The self is All, the world is a small fragment. Hence, the worldly vision is a narrowly focused one that cannot possibly embrace the self. But even this, is only approximately true. For, ultimately, there is only the self: the world is a chimera. The rope that is seen as a snake is strictly an either/or affair. One cannot see both the rope and the snake at the same time. Similarly, self and world are mutually exclusive.



Your personal universe does not exist by itself. It is merely a limited and distorted view of the real. It is not the universe that needs improving, but your way of looking.

We look at reality through the mind's eye, and so distort reality. The world of "things"—that is, names and forms—is brought about by desire. In this manner, a highly personalized world is created, the world of *Maya* (Illusion). What underlies this, the real—which Maharaj calls the Infinite Possibility—lies totally beyond the mind.



What is your happiness worth when you have to strive and labor for it? True happiness is spontaneous and effortless.

Whatever the mind has "gained"—i.e., put together—in a process of becoming can easily come unstuck again in a process of "un-becoming." In reality—but we don't know it—we are perfectly all right the way we are and we don't have to do a thing, just open ourselves to that truth. See also Maharaj's next two statements.



Pleasure and pain alternate. Happiness is unshakable. What you can seek and find is not the real thing. Find what you have never lost, find the inalienable.



You have a purpose only as long as you are not complete; until then completeness, perfection, is the purpose. But when you are complete in yourself, fully integrated within and without, then you enjoy the universe; you do not labor at it.



Harmony between the inner and the outer is happiness. On the other hand, self-identification with the outer causes suffering.



At the root of everything is the feeling “I am.” The state of mind: “there is a world” is secondary, for to *be* I do not need the world, the world needs me.



... ultimately you are the proof that God exists, not the other way round. For before any question about God can be put, you must be there to put it.

Before the mind—I am. “I am” is not a thought in the mind; *the mind happens to me, I do not happen to the mind*. And since time and space are in the mind, I am beyond time and space, eternal and omnipresent. (Italics by Compiler)



By no effort of logic or imagination can you change the “I am” into “I am not.” In the very denial of your being you assert it. Once you realize that the world is your own projection, you are free of it.

There is no real Non-Existence (Nothingness), for to deny Existence is to assert it.



Nobody ever fails in Yoga. . . . It is slow in the beginning and rapid in the end. When one is fully matured, realization is explosive.

The process of Yoga transcends the individual. Fundamentally, the “individual” does not even exist, only consciousness exists. And consciousness, which is conflict, fragmentation, is constantly yearning for wholeness, peace, so the learning process is ever continuing.

All creation toils for its self and will not rest until it returns to it.

Like the river flows to the ocean, so the "individual" will eventually return to the Whole. All creatures are essentially looking for happiness, for unification with their Source. Consciousness is inherently moving towards a state of non-duality, whose very quality is happiness and peace. Just like in the physical universe there is ever a tendency for the complex and heterogeneous to become simpler and uniform (Law of Entropy), so consciousness is subject to an analogous "spiritual entropy," in which the "part" merges with the Whole.



Once you know with absolute certainty that nothing can trouble you but your own imagination, you come to disregard your desires and fears, concepts and ideas, and live by truth alone.

Man is his own worst enemy, as the saying goes, and, one might add, paradoxically, his *only* enemy; for, collectively and individually, man is entirely responsible for his karma.



In the great mirror of consciousness images arise and disappear, and only memory gives them continuity. And memory is material—destructible, perishable, transient. On such flimsy foundations we build a sense of personal existence—vague,

intermittent, dreamlike. This vague persuasion: "I am so and so" obscures the changeless state of pure awareness and makes us believe that we are born to suffer and to die.



Consciousness and unconsciousness, while in the body, depend on the condition of the brain. But the self is beyond both, beyond the brain, beyond the mind. The fault of the instrument is no reflection on its user.

Thought or the mind should always be regarded as a mere tool.



Everybody sees the world through the idea he has of himself. . . . If you imagine yourself as separate from the world, the world will appear as separate from you and you will experience desire and fear. I do not see the world as separate from me, and so there is nothing for me to desire or fear.

Cf., Protagoras' "Man is the measure of all things": As is his vision, so will be his manner of being, his experience of the world.



Wisdom lies in never forgetting the self as the ever-present source of both the experiencer and his experience.



Wisdom is eternally negating the unreal. To see the unreal is wisdom. Beyond this lies the inexpressible.



Have your being outside this body of birth and death, and all your problems will be solved. They exist because you believe yourself born to die. Undeceive yourself and be free. You are not a person.

Once again, Maharaj points to the root of all our problems: our identification with the body and all the delusions springing therefrom.



Freedom is freedom from worry. Having realized that you cannot influence the results, pay no attention to your desires and fears. Let them come and go. Don't give them the nourishment of interest and attention.

Maharaj refers here to the type of personal attention that generally leads to personal intervention of one sort or another — i.e., a re-action to the emotions. To negate such re-action by means of impersonal attention or dispassionate observation may bring its own action that is not derived from the narrow personality.



The illusion of being the body-mind is there only because it is not investigated. Non-investigation is the thread on which all the states of mind are strung.



All states of mind, all names and forms of existence are rooted in non-enquiry, non-investigation, in imagination and credulity. It is right to say "I am," but to say "I am this," "I am that" is a sign of not enquiring, not examining, of mental weakness or lethargy.



A man who knows that he is neither body nor mind cannot be selfish, for he has nothing to be selfish for. Or, you may say, he is equally

"selfish" on behalf of everybody he meets; everybody's welfare is his own.



All your problems arise because you have defined and therefore limited yourself. When you do not think yourself to be this or that, all conflict ceases. Any attempt to do something about your problems is bound to fail, for what is caused by desire can be undone only in freedom from desire.

One aspect of this is the following: Not claiming to be anything, not laying claim to anything, there is nothing to "live up to"—so never any possibility of conflict!



This talk of personal self and universal self is the learner's stage; go beyond, do not be stuck in duality.



The pure mind sees things as they are—bubbles in consciousness. These bubbles are appearing, disappearing and re-appearing, without having real being. No particular cause can be ascribed to

them, for each is caused by all and affects all. Each bubble is a body and all these bodies are mine.

For "pure" we might read "clear" or "unsullied"; that is, not in our usual moralistic connotation.



To want nothing and do nothing—that is true creation! To watch the universe emerging and subsiding in one's heart is a wonder.

Students of Taoism will no doubt recognize in Maharaj's statement and the next two statements, a perfect summing up of the essence of that particular teaching!



When effort is needed, effort will appear. When effortlessness becomes essential, it will assert itself. You need not push life about. Just flow with it and give yourself completely to the task of the present moment, which is the dying now to the now. For living is dying. Without death life cannot be.



To work in the world is hard, to refrain from all unnecessary work is even harder.



The moment you know your real being, you are afraid of nothing. Death gives freedom and power. To be free in the world, you must die to the world. Then the universe is your own, it becomes your body, an expression and a tool. The happiness of being absolutely free is beyond description. On the other hand, he who is afraid of freedom cannot die.

Dying to the world is liberation. Having died once (even while still in the body), and given the fact that all fear stems originally from the threat of total and ultimate negation—i.e., death — there is nothing more to fear: one cannot die twice.



Does a happy man seek happiness? How restless people are, how constantly on the move! It is because they are in pain that they seek relief in pleasure. All the happiness they can imagine is in the assurance of repeated pleasure.

Concern for the continuity of pleasure, what we call “security,” is the mind’s prime mover and the only obstacle to happiness.

You give reality to concepts, while concepts are distortions of reality. Abandon all conceptualization and stay silent and attentive. Be earnest about it and all will be well with you.

This is the whole Law; there is nothing more to it.



Do not identify yourself with the world and you will not suffer.

Acting upon, or reacting to, the world is our spiritual undoing. The best remedy is to see that we ourselves have created that world—and not the other way around. In this insight, there is absolute freedom.



... pain and pleasure are the crests and valleys of the waves in the ocean of bliss. Deep down there is utter fullness.



Killing hurts the killer, not the killed.

Paradoxically, nothing fundamental happens to the killed; but in the killer duality is strengthened, tightening the bonds of Ignorance ever further.

If you could but keep in mind what you do not know, it would reveal to you its secrets.

Compare this with Christ's: "Seek and ye will find!"



Understand one thing well and you have arrived.

This sums up so well the essence of the vertical approach!



Vegetarianism is a worthy cause, but not the most urgent; all causes are served best by the man who has returned to his source.

There is really only one priority, after which everything else will fall into place, and that is to find out what one *is*. Let us first set our own house in order, then see if there is still need for concern about other things.



The gospel of self-realization, once heard, will never be forgotten. Like a seed left in the ground, it will wait for the right season and sprout and grow into a mighty tree.

There is a story of an Indian writer who once saw a page from the Upanishads blowing across a courtyard in the breeze. He read a fragment, and it changed his life. The Upanishads are probably the earliest recorded statement of this gospel of self-realization in the history of mankind.



When all the false self-identifications are thrown away, what remains is all-embracing love.



Learn to look without imagination, to listen without distortion: that is all. Stop attributing names and shapes to the essentially nameless and formless, realize that every mode of perception is subjective, that what is seen or heard, touched or smelled, felt or thought, expected or imagined, is in the mind and not in reality, and you will experience peace and freedom from fear.

This learning to look without projection by the mind is not a trick. Rather, it is the unlearning of a bad habit. Names and shapes and their untold associations through thought have only secondary importance, except on the purely functional and technological levels.



Playing with various approaches may be due to resistance to going within, to the fear of having to abandon the illusion of being something or somebody in particular.

A habit not uncommon among theologians and students of comparative religion!



There is no such thing as a person. There are only restrictions and limitations. The sum total of these defines the person.

What we call "persons" are in reality processes—and even then only empirically, within a space-time framework; that is, relatively, within our given mode of perception, and not from an absolute point of view. On the absolute level, there is only Consciousness—the awareness of "I am." The restrictions and limitations that Maharaj alludes to are the notions "I am *this*," "I am *that*," which reduce us to the relative level by bringing about the unreal person. This is the reason Maharaj admonishes us not to veer from "I am." The whole art of meditation consists in, or at least starts with, the watching of the play—the emergence, disappearance, and re-emergence—of the innumerable this's and that's.



From my point of view everything happens by itself, quite spontaneously. But man imagines

that he works for an incentive, towards a goal. He always has a reward in mind and strives for it.

If man is not a separate psychological entity, then indeed by logical necessity things must happen by themselves.



Suffering is a call for enquiry, all pain needs investigation. Don't be lazy to think.

Just like bodily pain is a signal that something is wrong with the body, so conflict, anxiety, mental turmoil, is an indication that something is wrong with the functioning of the psyche, that the psyche needs investigating. We ignore such signals are our peril.



Living is life's only purpose.



In reality time and space exist in you; you do not exist in them. They are modes of perception, but they are not the only ones.

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The mind creates time and space, and takes its own creations for reality. All is here and now, but we do not see it. Truly, all is in me and by me. There is nothing else. The very idea of “else” is a disaster and a calamity.



Time is in the mind, space is in the mind. The law of cause and effect is also a way of thinking. In reality all is here and now, all is one. Multiplicity and diversity are in the mind only.

Time and space have no objective basis in reality; they are mere categories of the mind, and the same applies to causality. All three arise and subside with the mind. According to Maharaj, the entire universe at any time affects even the smallest particle, which means really that all things are interrelated and there is no point in identifying single causes.



It is the choices you make that are wrong. To imagine that some little thing—food, sex, power, fame—will make you happy is to deceive yourself.

Happiness is to be found only in the Self, not in the transient things of the world.

The self is universal and its aims are universal. There is nothing personal about the self. Live an orderly life, but do not make it a goal by itself.



Nothing profits the world as much as the abandoning of profits. A man who no longer thinks in terms of loss and gain is the truly non-violent man, for he is beyond all conflict.

To think in terms of gain and loss implies the unthinking affirmation of one's basic separation from the rest of the Universe. This separation is man's primeval act of violence.



To divide and particularize is in the mind's very nature. There is no harm in dividing. But separation goes against fact. Things and people are different, but they are not separate. Nature is one, reality is one. There are opposites, but no opposition.



... when you look at anything as separate from you, you cannot love it for you are afraid of it. Alienation causes fear, and fear deepens aliena-

tion. It is a vicious circle. Only self-realization can break it. Go for it resolutely.



Just as a speck in the eye, by causing inflammation, may wipe out the world, so the mistaken idea: "I am the body-mind" causes the self-concern, which obscures the universe. It is useless to fight the sense of being a limited and separate person unless the roots of it are laid bare. Selfishness is rooted in the mistaken ideas of oneself. Clarification of the mind is yoga.



The mind cannot know what is beyond the mind, but the mind is known by what is beyond it.



In reality nothing happens. Onto the screen of the mind destiny forever projects its pictures, memories of former projections, and thus illusion constantly renews itself. The pictures come and go—light intercepted by ignorance. See the light and disregard the picture.

Things happen only to the body and mind, never to one's self—the changeless matrix of the changeful.



You began as a child and you will end as a child. Whatever you have acquired in the meantime you must lose and start at the beginning.



What you need will come to you if you do not ask for what you do *not* need. Yet only few people reach this state of complete dispassion and detachment. It is a very high state, the very threshold of liberation.

A fine definition of the state of austerity in the spiritual sense!



There are always moments when one feels empty and estranged. Such moments are most desirable, for it means the soul has cast its moorings and is sailing for distant places. This is detachment—when the old is over and the new has not yet come. If you are afraid, the state may be distressing: but there is really nothing to be afraid

of. Remember the instruction: Whatever you come across—go beyond.



There is a state beyond forgetting and not-forgetting—the natural state. To remember, to forget—these are all states of mind, thought-bound, word-bound.

I cannot remember ever to have started my “I-ness”; I cannot imagine ever to cease the “I am,” since my idea of nothingness does not reach it.



All real progress is irreversible. Ups and downs merely show that the teaching has not been taken to heart and translated into action fully.



The timeless knows the time, the time does not know the timeless.

The timeless is the ground of all things, and “things” are always in time. The greater contains the lesser, never the other way round.

The memory of the past unfulfilled desires traps energy, which manifests itself as a person. When its charge gets exhausted, the person dies. Unfulfilled desires are carried over into the next birth. Self-identification with the body creates ever fresh desires and there is no end to them unless this mechanism of bondage is clearly seen. It is clarity that is liberating, for you cannot abandon desire unless its causes and effects are clearly seen. I do not say that the same person is reborn. It dies and dies for good. But its memories remain and their desires and fears. They supply the energy for a new person.



Peace, power, happiness, these are never personal states; nobody can say “my peace,” “my power”—because “mine” implies exclusivity which is fragile and insecure.



You are concerned with your own happiness and I am telling you that there is no such thing. Happiness is never your own, it is where the “I” is not.

Happiness is only when Reality fills your heart, and in Reality there are no divisions such as “I” and “Thou.”

Unless you know yourself well, how can you know another? And when you know yourself—you *are* the other.



To be a person is to be asleep.



Liberation is not the result of some means skilfully applied, nor of circumstances. It is beyond the causal process. Nothing can compel it, nothing can prevent it.



Think of yourself by all means. Only do not bring the idea of a body into the picture. There is only a stream of sensations, perceptions, memories and ideations.

Descartes caused much confusion in Western thinking with his famous (or, should one say, infamous): “I think, therefore I am.” This, of course, is a flagrant example of “jumping to conclusions.” All he was entitled to state is: “I receive sense impressions, I think; therefore, there is sensation, mentation.” This sensation and mentation can never serve as proof for any-

thing beyond itself. It is sufficient unto itself; and thus, the insight leads inevitably to silence—the silence that speaks so loudly of the limitation and impotence of the mind in knowing Reality.

It is obvious that what Descartes really means is “I am a person,” because of the befuddling influence of the observation of a body with which his thought had identified itself. Were it otherwise, he may well have reversed his revelation, as follows: “I am, therefore I think.”



A man who is given a stone and assured that it is a priceless diamond will be mightily pleased until he realizes his mistake; in the same way pleasures lose their tang and pains their barb when the self is known. Both are seen as they are—conditional responses, mere reactions, plain attractions and repulsions, based on memories or preconceptions. Usually pleasure and pain are experienced when expected. It is all a matter of acquired habits and convictions.



As long as there is the body and the sense of identity with the body, frustration is inevitable. Only when you know yourself as entirely alien to and different from the body, will you find respite from the mixture of fear and craving inseparable from the “I-am-the-body” idea.

Do not all psychological problems originate from this identification with body? The body's needs are tolerable, but it does not stop there. Unfortunately, we are not satisfied with bodily or "vegetative" existence, with just "being." We are more interested in "becoming" something, either *this* or *that*. Thus, through identification with "body," "I"-ness is brought about, "mind" as a desire-center crystallizes and henceforth remains a tremendous burden that is ever with us, and we are far removed from the consciousness of I AM as indicated by Maharaj.



The "here" is everywhere, and the "now" always. Go beyond the "I-am-the-body" idea, and you will find that space and time are in you and not you in space and time. Once you have understood this, the main obstacle to realization is removed.



The world is but the surface of the mind, and the mind is infinite. What we call thoughts are just ripples in the mind. When the mind is quiet, it reflects reality. When it is motionless through and through, it dissolves and only reality remains. This reality is so concrete, so actual, so much more tangible than mind and matter, that compared to it even diamond is soft like butter. This overwhelming actuality makes the world dream-like, misty, irrelevant.

This answers beautifully the question so often on people's minds: What is the value, if any, of a quiet mind? All perception is ultimately through the mind, our sixth sense organ. Just like an astronomer looking at the night sky through his telescope gets best results when there is a minimum of atmospheric turbulence, so man can see things clearly only when his mind is absolutely tranquil.



Happiness is our real nature and we shall never rest until we find it. But rarely do we know where to seek it. Once you have understood that the world is but a mistaken view of reality, and it is not what it appears to be, you are free of its obsessions.

Happiness is not to be pursued, we only need to dismantle the causes of our unhappiness as indicated by Maharaj, for Happiness—a qualitatively different state of being—to assert itself.



... pleasure is a distraction and a nuisance, for it merely increases the false conviction that one needs to have and do things to be happy when in reality it is just the opposite.

One implication of this is that it transcends the old adage about life being unfair because some have more than others.

To see everything as imagination born of desire is necessary for self-realization. We miss the real by lack of attention and create the unreal by excess of imagination.



Do what you believe in and believe in what you do. All else is waste of energy and time.



To *be* is to suffer. The narrower the circle of my self-identification, the more acute the suffering caused by desire and fear.

To *be*, in this context, is to exist as a fragment, in a state of duality. That fragment ever seeks security, not realizing that there is no such thing—hence, its everlasting travail.



The acceptance of the unreal as real is the obstacle; to see the false as false and abandon the false brings reality into being.

When the rope, which was taken for a snake, is seen for what it really is, it loses its sway over the mind. The insight brings instant freedom.

What I teach is the ancient and simple way of liberation through understanding. Understand your own mind and its hold on you will snap. The mind misunderstands, misunderstanding is its very nature. Right understanding is the only remedy, whatever name you give it.

The only bondage is that of the mind's lack of understanding; its terror is wholly of its own making.



The person is what I appear to be to other persons. To myself I am the infinite expanse of consciousness in which innumerable persons emerge and disappear in endless succession.

Cf.: "How strange that in me, the limitless ocean, the individualized selves arise as waves. They cross each other, play for a while and disappear according to their respective natures." *Ashtavakra Gita*



Just keep in mind the feeling "I am," merge in it, until your mind and feeling become one. By repeated attempts you will stumble on the right balance of attention and affection, and your mind will be firmly established in the thought-feeling "I am." Whatever you think, say, or do, this sense of

immutable and affectionate being remains as the ever-present background of the mind.

This really implies disassociation from the mind with its innumerable demands and general restlessness—the mind which feeds on the false persona, self-created by the mind's imagination.

It occurs to me that for those who find meditation upon “I am” difficult, a valid alternative might be “I am no-thing,” since it expresses essentially the same reality.



The changeful keeps on changing, while the changeless is waiting. Do not expect the changeful to take you to the changeless—it can never happen.

In a real world of timelessness and spacelessness, where is change?



. . . you are the perceiving point, the non-dimensional source of all dimensions.

Since that perceiving point contains all dimensions, it must of itself be *meta*-dimensional, or *beyond* dimensions. Hence, neither the very notion of a “point” nor its opposite, “everywhere,” can even hint at the indescribable.

The realized man knows what others merely hear, but do not experience. Intellectually they may seem convinced, but in action they betray their bondage . . .



Epilogue

When all is said and done, it seems rather ironic that Maharaj's message, which is basically extremely simple, has been found difficult to understand by some. The same has happened to the original teachings of the Upanishads and the related teachings of Ramana Maharshi and J. Krishnamurti. Anything simple in life can be made complicated, even to such an extent that it is humanly impossible to grasp any longer. Very often people unconsciously complicate or obfuscate insights because the simple truth is too explosive to a mind that is fixed in a rut, attached to some preconceived world outlook from which it derives comfort and security. So one dresses up that truth to make it more palatable, but in the process waters it down.

What Maharaj is essentially saying is that man's much-vaunted individuality is a total illusion. Just like a rainbow is actually an optical illusion, so the individuality is based on a misunderstanding by the mind from which it must disabuse itself. There is no liberation other than surrendering our attachment to this false abstraction. This surrender is not an act of will, such as surrendering oneself to some Deity; for what is will other than part of the individuality that has to be surrendered? What it amounts to is a giving up, a dying to all that I have built up for and through myself—the attachment to all my material and intellectual possessions. This letting-go represents a total break with continuity which, initially at least, is enormously painful because I have so much invested in “my” past and its memories. There is tremendous resistance to facing this truth, as it is tantamount to denying one's own being. Now to live without background of the past signifies a revolutionary new life style, because psychologically one lives from moment to moment with the unknown; one is totally without precedent. Life then acquires a new freshness and a new meaning, as one recognizes that one is nothing in oneself. Having

cast off all psychological accouterments, there is nothing any longer to protect nor has one got anything to prove to oneself or the world. Whatever one does is an action without thought for its fruits, which means that one no longer cultivates the little self. For it has become very clear that all that is involved in the area of the "individual" is falsehood, and, conversely, all that is false has its source in the mistaken concept of the "individual." Strangely, man is actually dimly aware of this truth, for his attitude towards the subject is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, he is intolerant of any activities that are overly ego-induced, when he will talk derogatorily about ego-centric behavior. On the other hand, he praises the uniqueness of individuality. Now ego is individuality; we just cannot have it both ways.

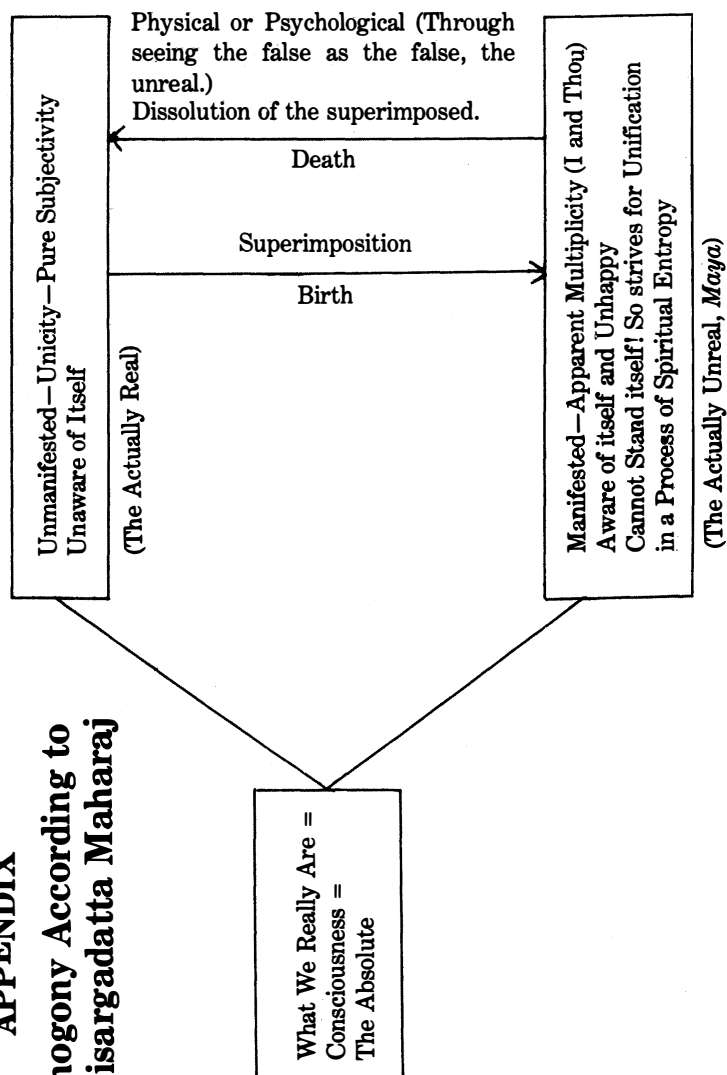
Thus one who is earnest in matters spiritual will be very watchful of his entire thought life—the continuous feeling—of the ego, which ever envelops man like an invisible aura. It needs to be dropped in the same manner that one discards a suit of old clothes. But the analogy is not entirely accurate, as there cannot be an entity that consciously does the "dropping" since that could only be the ego—and ego cannot eliminate itself, by definition. It is more subtle than words would convey. Rather, the very act of seeing oneself as one is—a composite of ideas and images without inherent reality, but given continuity by memory and habit—is the catalyst to this transformation. When the fantasy is exposed for what it is, reality asserts itself of its own accord—which is the real magic. In that reality there is a creativity and uniqueness that transcends the limitations of the individual. The mechanicalness and inherent pettiness of all psychological processes are seen for what they really are. Also, our sharp demarcation between life and death has been totally wiped out. Knowing well what it is to die to every moment, while still in the body, one is on intimate terms with Death: physical survival has lost its compelling force and importance. One truly goes through life with a lighter tread.

Maharaj and Morality

Some persons, especially in the West, may wonder whether Maharaj has placed sufficient emphasis on morality in man's spiritual quest. The point is that man freed from his fetters is Morality personified. Such a man therefore does not need any

moralistic injunctions in order to live righteously. Thus, Maharaj's primary concern is to free man from his bondage, whereafter everything else will take care of itself. On the other hand, man in his unredeemed state cannot possibly live morally, no matter what moral teaching he is given. It is an intrinsic impossibility, for his very foundation is immorality. That is, he lives a lie, a basic contradiction: functioning in all his relationships as the separate entity he believes himself to be, whereas in reality no such separation exists. His every action therefore does violence to other "selves" and other "creatures," which are only manifestations of the unitary consciousness. So society had to invent some restraints in order to protect itself from its own worst excesses and thereby maintain some kind of status quo. The resulting arbitrary rules, which vary with place and time and are therefore purely relative, it calls "morality," and by upholding this man-invented "ideal" as the highest good—oftentimes sanctioned by religious "revelation" and scriptures—society has provided man with one more excuse to disregard the quest for liberation or relegate it to a fairly low priority in his scheme of things.

APPENDIX Cosmogony According to Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



continued on next page

Note how mind activity—which is essentially the imagination—superimposes itself on the real and in this way produces the world of multiplicity. Only when one dies psychologically to all that, there is the natural state Maharaj talks about (although no “one” who lives it!), and the cycle has completed itself.

The superimposition takes on a life of its own, so that there is no awareness of one being a composite of real and unreal. Interestingly, there is a modern scientific analogy. Physicists use the term “superposition” to denote a superimposition of one thing onto another, such as a double exposure in photography. A “coherent superposition” goes, however, farther than that. It is a composite which has assumed its own identity and character, quite distinct from its original components. Such coherent superpositions are very common in quantum mechanics. For example, the wave function of a particle like a photon is the coherent superposition of all the possible interactions between that particle and a measuring system. Seen in this light, man in the dualistic state manifests himself as the superposition of all the possible interactions between the “observer” (i.e., the sum total of his conditioning) and the “world.”

“Our lives, instead of being lived *by* us as we seem to think, are in fact being lived *for* us like all the characters in one’s dream. . . .”
From: R. S. Balsekar, *Pointers from Nisargadatta Maharaj*

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